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Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights, including the right to development

Written statement* submitted by Amuta for NGO Responsibility, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement, which is hereby circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[28 February 2018]

* This written statement is issued, unedited, in the language(s) received from the submitting non-governmental organization(s).

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Statement of the Amuta for NGO Responsibility

UNICEF and its NGO Working Group Fail Children in Israel and the Palestinian Authority

- UNICEF plays a central role in a campaign to have Israel included on a UN blacklist of "grave" violators of children's rights. The list appears as an annex to the UN Secretary-General's annual report on Children and Armed Conflict (CAAC). This political agenda is a primary facet of UNICEF's activities relating to Israel, completely inconsistent with its mandate of "child protection" and from its guidelines for neutrality and impartiality.
- UNICEF-oPt's partners ("working group") for this campaign are radical advocacy non-governmental organizations (NGOs). These anti-Israel NGOs play an integral role in carrying out the campaign and receive substantial funding from UNICEF.
- UNICEF-oPt's NGO partners publish misleading and false reports on the treatment of Palestinian minors involved in attacks and arrested by the IDF, rife with distortions and inaccuracies and devoid of necessary context. These same erroneous and unverified claims are then laundered through a UNICEF database to a variety of UN publications, lending them legitimacy and prominence.
- Many of the NGOs in UNICEF's working group have no capacity in the issues of child protection and welfare. Several of these groups are also contributing to UNICEF's database and publications via the use of unqualified, unprofessional, and untrained volunteers.
- Several of the Palestinian groups – including Defence for Children International-Palestine (DCI-P), which plays a leading role in this campaign – have close links to the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) – listed as a terrorist organization by the United States of America, EU, Canada, and Israel. In contrast, UNICEF-oPt states, "UNICEF has a clear policy that is does not fund support (sic) organizations which are listed as terrorist organizations by the United Nations." As part of the systemic anti-Israel bias and antisemitism within UN frameworks, this list deliberately excludes Hamas, the PFLP, Islamic Jihad, and other Palestinian terror groups. In other words, UNICEF appears to place no prohibitions on working with or funding to Palestinian terrorist organizations.
- At the time claims of mistreatment were made and adopted by UNICEF, at least one of the Working Group NGOs had a PFLP "leader" on staff (according to a PFLP announcement). It also appears that he was involved in collecting data for UNICEF's database.
- Perhaps because of these Palestinian terror links, several UNICEF-oPt NGO partners recommended inclusion of the IDF on the CAAC blacklist, but absurdly claimed they lacked sufficient evidence to recommend inclusion of the PFLP or Hamas. Similarly, perhaps the presence of terror-linked NGOs in the working group explains why UNICEF-opt does not document or report on the recruitment and use of Palestinian child soldiers (see below).
- A key component of the UN's Children and Armed Conflict campaign is to end the exploitation and use of children as combatants and child soldiers. Although Palestinian armed groups routinely use children in this way, there is little evidence that UNICEF-oPt funding is devoted towards exposing or ending this practice. In fact, a UNICEF Children and Armed Conflict (CAAC) bulletin admits that "In Gaza, the Working Group was **not in a position to document cases of child recruitment and use of children in armed conflict"** (emphasis added). This admission of an inability to carry out the core mission of its UN mandate in Israel, the West Bank, and Gaza calls into question the necessity and utility of continued funding for the agency in the region.
- Other UNICEF-oPt partners are NGOs that seek to marginalize Israel through BDS (boycotts, divestment, and sanctions) initiatives. One such contributor is the World Council of Churches' EAPPI program, which is heavily involved in church-based BDS and whose non-professional volunteers purport to collect data for UNICEF's database.
- UNICEF's campaign is funded by the EU and its member states, and Japan. Correspondence with some donor states indicates that the governments are unaware of the political and unqualified NGOs that receive their funds and to UNICEF's emphasis on anti-Israel advocacy. In at least one case, UNICEF appears to have misrepresented to the donor government how funds would be and were used. Other donor states refused to answer our inquiries, highlighting the accountability and transparency deficit in UN funding. We commend the government of Canada for its willingness to

extensively engage on the substantive issues and the high level of governmental transparency. In contrast, the governments of Norway, Japan, and Sweden refused to engage or provide substantive information.

- UNICEF-oPt signed a lawfare agreement with the Palestinian Authority seeking $3.4 million over the next five years from international donors to engage "human rights mechanisms…to hold Israel accountable for its obligations under international law."
- UNICEF's reporting on Israel is qualitatively different and more extreme than its reporting on other Middle East countries. Allegations of "widespread and systematic abuse" are meant to echo the definition of crimes against humanity in the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court. UNICEF does not employ similar language for other conflict zones.
- As noted by one of the NGOs involved, lobbying for inclusion of Israel on the CAAC blacklist would lead to the creation of an official "UN-mandated country task force" on Israel that would provide greater financial and other resources to UNICEF-oPt and its NGO partners. In other words, the advocacy appears to have been motivated by money and access rather than child protection.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the Amuta's findings, we recommend:

To UNICEF International:

- Cease all cooperation with NGOs with ties to terrorist organizations, including those with links to the PFLP.
- Publicly retract and correct inaccurate claims made in UNICEF reporting on Israel. In particular, retract those documents that relied in large part on information sourced from PFLP-linked NGOs and BDS activists.
- Instruct UNICEF-oPt to disband the current working group and reinstate a new working group of impartial humanitarian organizations, professionals, and experts. This process must be conducted transparently and with external oversight.

To Donor Governments:

- Review all funding to UNICEF projects to guarantee that funds are not being distributed to NGOs with ties to terrorist organizations.
- Develop and implement robust funding guidelines for all government spending to ensure that funds are not provided to groups with ties to terrorism or that promote violent rhetoric or antisemitism.
- Review all funding to UNICEF to ensure that it is used to carry out the projects intended by the donor government.
- Cease all funding being used by UNICEF for anti-Israel political advocacy. Ensure that funding is used solely for humanitarian purposes.
- Institute continuous monitoring mechanisms to ensure ongoing compliance with these best practices.

To UN Secretary-General:

- Recognize that UNICEF reports on Israel have been substantially compromised and manipulated for destructive political goals, misrepresent the actual situation, and should be excluded from consideration for the "Annual Report of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict" and its Annex.
- Reports issued by current NGO members of the UNICEF-oPt Working Group should also be excluded.